

IT PLAN – AGENCY OPERATIONS

2015- 2017 Biennium

Agency: Protection & Advocacy Project

Responsible Party:

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Technology Description:

The Protection and Advocacy Project (P&A) is a state agency with the federally mandated purpose of protecting, and advocating for the rights of people with disabilities. Clients of the Project include individuals of all ages, with physical and/or mental disabilities, who experience rights violations in a spectrum of areas including education, access to needed services through the state system or with individual service providers, abuse/neglect/exploitation, financial entitlements, medical services/treatment, etc. P&A provides a continuum of services from information/referral to legal representation, in response to individual rights violations, and engages in pro-active educational, technical assistance and legislative activities to impact on the services and rights of individuals with disabilities.

P&A relies heavily on Information Technology to facilitate the provision of its services. P&A has ten (10) offices which are located in Williston, Minot, Belcourt, Devils Lake, Grafton, Grand Forks, Fargo, Jamestown, Bismarck, and Dickinson. Each regional office is staffed by 1- 3 advocates. Bismarck is a combined regional and state administrative office and has 15 staff. P&A's regional offices do not have support staff. Supervision and support is provided to regional staff from the administrative office. Reliable telecommunication services and quality network connectivity are essential for P&A's functioning.

P&A relies heavily on the use of individual PCs and Office Suite software in accomplishing its mission. The Internet is used for research, as a vehicle for accessing our database service, and for reporting client and financial data. Email is used to facilitate communication between staff, staff and clients, and staff and service providers. It has become an essential vehicle for conducting business. Recently P&A has also begun using videoconferencing to facilitate communication and training.

Protection and Advocacy [P&A] maintains an inventory of all IT assets within the PeopleSoft Asset Management module. The IT assets purchased by P&A are obtained from contract vendors when possible. P&A follows procurement guidelines on all purchases. P&A follows state guidelines on the retirement of all assets and utilizes Surplus Property services.

We are currently replacing desktop PC's every 4 years and laptops every 3 years. Printers and faxes are being replaced on a 6 year cycle. LCD projectors are on the same cycle as printers/faxes. Other IT equipment is replaced when no longer functional.

When possible, P&A maintains functional, older laptops, monitors, printers, keyboards, and mice for emergency loan to regional offices in the event of equipment breakdown. These are routinely retired and replaced with newer models as equipment is replaced. P&A staff is provided with desktop computers. Management staff also has statewide responsibilities, work beyond a traditional 40 hour week, and have some travel requirements. They are provided laptops in addition to a desktop PC to ensure continuity of communication and access when mobile. Currently another laptop is provided as a mobile solution to 1 staff with state wide responsibilities and significant travel requirements. When laptops/notebooks are replaced, these are made available to staff that do not have laptops and for use in our conference rooms. These are retired when no longer functional. We currently have several working laptops in the agency pool, but they have Windows XP operating systems and are not part of the NDGOV network. They are only useful for word processing or presentations where Internet connectivity is not needed.

Software consists primarily of standard Office Suite Software. It is replaced with available newer versions upon the replacement of users' computers. Dragon Naturally Speaking has been purchased for a few staff and JAWS is used by another staff as an accommodation. The IT budget includes upgrades and maintenance for this software.

The agency established a video conferencing site in the Bismarck state office during the 11-13 biennium and has begun implementing desktop video conferencing for regional staff in the 13-15 biennium. The 15-17 biennium budget includes money for continued implementation and ongoing costs.

Planned Activities:

P&A has established the following IT-related goals and objectives for the 15-17 biennium:

Goal 1: P&A will maintain IT systems that manage, store, and allow P&A to provide current, accurate data to the public, to funding sources, and to other stakeholders.

Objective 1: P&A will maintain an effective database system for collecting client data.

P&A will continue to subscribe to a database service developed and maintained by the National Disability Rights Network. The Disability Advocacy Database [DAD] was designed specifically to meet the data collection and case management requirements of P&A systems. The database has a web-interface and meets agency requirements for security and confidentiality. P&A's IT Coordinator is a member of the committee that oversees changes and enhancements to the database system.

Almost all of P&A's Federal funding sources have moved to web-based reporting systems. This has facilitated the required annual reporting process in most cases.

Objective 2: P&A will maintain effective activity and time-tracking software for accounting and reporting purposes.

A time-keeping/accounting module is available within the DAD system. This is continually being improved, but is not compatible with our state system. This is widely used by other P&A systems (primarily private non-profit organizations.) It may offer viable electronic time-tracking for our agency in the future, but we currently use liquid office and Excel forms as a bridge to PeopleSoft for time tracking and reporting. We will continue to explore available options.

Objective 3: P&A will use technology to facilitate effective and efficient management and storage of data and records.

P&A utilizes ITD shared file and print storage to meet our current storage, file sharing, and back up needs. The subscription database service also provides ready access to client information and programmatic records and effectively and securely stores and backs up client records.

Objective 4: P&A will maintain computer hardware that meets performance needs and is in good repair by replacing desktop computers on a 4 year cycle and laptop computers on a 3 year cycle.

P&A purchases computers through the state contract and is on track with the 4 yr./3yr. cycle.

P&A has purchased desktop support from vendors with state contracts when the need exceeds the time or expertise of P&A's IT coordinator. Most vendors rely on

remote desktop management software to provide support, which does not always meet P&A's need. P&A needs to purchase from regional vendors when hands-on assistance is required. Purchasing desktop support is very expensive. The cost of the desktop support service proposed by ITD exceeds previous expenditures and costs for desktop support by such a vast margin that it is not an option. It does not meet our need for an *affordable* desktop support solution. We will continue to meet our needs internally and purchase from regional vendors as needed.

Goal 2: P&A will maintain IT systems that foster efficient and cost-effective intra-agency, interagency, and client communication and which improve access to disability-related information.

Objective 1: P&A will maintain standardized, compatible versions of word processing software across all users that vary by no more than one version.

P&A currently utilizes Microsoft Word 2010 and 2013. Microsoft Word 2007 has been phased out in the 13-15 biennium as we purchased 2013 licenses. The different versions of Word have proven to be adequately compatible through the use of free conversion downloads from Microsoft or by staff saving documents to a compatible, lower format.

Objective 2: P&A will support and maintain office suite software, exclusive of word processing components that varies by no more than two versions.

P&A currently uses Office Suite 2010 and Office Suite 2013. Office Suite 2007 has been phased out in 13-15. As we replace PC's and laptops, we will purchase new productivity software if needed.

Objective 3: P&A will maintain access to on-line legal research for at least one user.

P&A will continue to contract with the National Disability Rights Network to obtain access to on-line legal research.

Objective 4: P&A will maintain Internet and email access for staff that is functional, reasonably fast, and secure.

The availability of service from ITD and cost dictates connection type. We have two, single-advocate offices using DSL high speed connections. The remaining offices have T1 or Fiber connections. We share connections and are co-located with other agencies, which helps defray costs.

P&A utilizes Microsoft Exchange email. The Exchange server is hosted and managed by ITD. Client confidentiality is currently managed through a

combination of software and agency policy and procedure. The P&A policy manual states:

- Client identifiable information may NOT be transmitted in e-mail. Email content, "subject" description, and attachment names should not be identifiable. Email attachments containing client identifiable information should be redacted or password protected.

P&A implemented secure email by July 1, 2009, utilizing Iron Port Secure Mail Solution. This solution uses push technology which allows password-protected, encrypted email to be delivered directly to the intended recipient. This will continue to be used.

Objective 5: P&A will maintain an informative, accessible website.

The P&A website is maintained by ITD. Work requests for changes are submitted to ITD through the WMS system. We have included maintenance costs in our 15-17 budget request.

Objective 6: P&A will utilize available technologies to enhance the efficiency and quality of internal communication.

Because almost half of P&A's staff is located in remote offices, meetings of internal work groups and routine supervision must be done via phone or, if done face-to-face, necessitates significant travel time and expense. There are limitations to the effectiveness of communication that is wholly verbal or written. We have implemented a video conferencing site in the Bismarck state office and it works extremely well for staff meetings and trainings. We have begun implementing desktop video conferencing in the 13-15 biennium for our regional offices, utilizing desktop webcams, microphones, and software available through ITD.

Planned Changes and Updates to Technology:

In compliance with legislative mandate, P&A purchases network, communications, and IT support services through ITD. The majority of our offices are co-located with other agencies and share network connection costs with those agencies. Email, website hosting, and file and print server storage are also obtained through ITD. Any cost increases for these items are driven by ITD.

The availability of service and costs dictate the network connection type used in each of our offices. We have two, single-advocate offices using DSL high speed connections. The costs of these connections per user is extremely high, even with the reduction in the Broadband surcharge fee that occurred.

The remaining offices have T1 or Fiber connections. We share connections and are co-located with other agencies, which helps defray costs. This has met our need to date. Desktop video conferencing is being implemented for our regional offices, utilizing desktop webcams, microphones, and software available through ITD.

The remainder of the IT budget includes maintenance costs for basic telephone service and long distance, modem lines, '800 numbers, network costs, website hosting and maintenance, consolidated server fees, server disk storage fees, records management fees, desktop support costs, and data processing fees. It also includes routine replacement and upgrade costs for software licenses and IT equipment, such as Desktop PCs, laptops, multifunction copiers, and printers. An agency LCD projector and digital transcription/recorder package are included in the budget and we have included some money to implement the use of cell phones for staff serving On Call.

Technologies being watched or investigated: None